

Feb. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005  
Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order. The roll was called by Ruby Polk. Those present were:

Clay Berry, Donna Borgmeyer, Bill Burris, Michael Fester, Debbie Head, Beverly Kaskadden, Brenda Kennedy, Russell McCampbell, Mike Merrick, Daniel Nellis, Ruby Polk, Jim Sucharski, April Tooloze, John Wunder, and Brian Wekamp. The members absent were: Abby Pfefferkorn, Mary Kay Savage, and Stan Grimsley.

Mark Laird welcomed the committee to the Springfield region. He presented the activities of the Springfield office. He provided the council members with answers regarding the services being provided in the region.

Mike Fester commented on the various changes. He discussed the proposed abolition of the Regional Rehabilitation service offices. This would result in moving the management and control of rehabilitation to Washington, D.C. and abolish the regional input to both the states and D.C. legislators.

There is also a Section 107 review, which will be conducted this spring, by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Mike Fester and Mark Laird will be part of the review team.

He also discussed the impact of the Governor's budget regarding Rehabilitation Services for the Blind. There is to be no substantive changes in the budget allocation. There is to be a consolidation of Information Technology with the Office of Administration, which is consistent with his pledge. At this time Mike Fester is waiting to discuss new appointments to the Council with the Governor.

The position of Prevention of Blindness Coordinator has been filled by Brenda Kennedy. She will be working with State corporations and be the contact for National Jobs Initiatives.

Mike Merrick provided the Council with a demonstration of the on-line rules and regulations; for the Vocational Rehabilitation

Services for the blind. This will provide the counselors and the general public with access to the rules and regulations for services. Mike Merrick identified the need to review the State plan. This plan must be revised and submitted by the end of March. He stated that last year that we had four priorities in the State plan. They were:

1. Innovation and Transition Services.
2. Employment Strategies for Staff Retention.
3. Increasing the Diversity and Minority Efforts, and
4. Increased Visibility of Rehabilitation Services Employment efforts (employment services to Independent Living Clients and Older Blind Clients)

**New Policy:** Develop a new Coherent Transition Policy for Rehabilitation Services for the Blind. (providing an internal policy.) Motioned by Bill Burris; Seconded by Jim Sucharski and Debbie Head. Passed by Council vote.

**New Strategy:** Establish a statewide business development strategy. Provide Employment Coordinator for corporations and other statewide entities.

Motioned by Ruby Polk; Seconded by April Toolooze, Passed by Council vote.

**New Strategy:** Change primary focus of interview to vocational goals and employment placement. Re-evaluate current operational practices, provide training, focus the Counselor philosophy on assessment, basic interview skills, and basic vocational goals.

Motioned by Jim Sucharski; Seconded by Debbie Head. Passed by Council vote.

**New Strategy:** Develop relationships with groups such as A.A.R.P. and Greenthumb to promote employment of senior citizens.

Motioned by Jim Sucharski; Seconded by James Pelfrey. Passed by Council vote.

Proposed Strategy: Council initiated satisfaction survey to determine staff satisfaction and promote employee retention.

Motion moved by April Tooloze; Seconded by Debbie Head.

Defeated by Council vote, 8-3

Priority: Improve collaboration with statewide entities that serve similar interests regarding blind and visually impaired.

Identified as a priority, making this the 5<sup>th</sup> (fifth) priority.

Motioned by Jim Sucharski; seconded by Lawrence Luck. Passed by Council vote.

Gary's letter was read and discussed. Preliminary discussion has begun regarding this particular concern. Staff from the Rehabilitation Services for the Blind had indicated that this would be a topic of discussion at the future summit meeting with the statewide advocacy groups. Mike Merrick had previously indicated that the percentage requirements were removed from what constitutes a sheltered workshop. The mailing which Mike Merrick sent is a proposal for establishing a coherent approach within Rehabilitation Services for the Blind.

The satisfaction survey was discussed. The mailing of this survey is to be accomplished as soon as possible. This would allow the results from this survey to be presented at the May meeting. There is to be a Braille note included in the mailing indicating that it is a survey with alternative media being available for the print survey.

There was a discussion regarding the title of liaison. It was requested that the title should be Executor Director, so that more status could be accorded to the council's representative. After discussion it was moved by Jim Sucharski and seconded by Debbie Head. It was passed by Council vote

There was a discussion of the Statewide Student Conference that will be held this summer. Involved in the planning will be: Beverly Kaskadden, Mike Merrick, and Jim Sucharski.

The annual report was distributed to the council members. There were a number of compliments made regarding the contents. The

fact that there was specific useful information was noted. This report was submitted on time to the Governor and was accepted. We had as guest speakers Dr. Paul Ajuwon, Ph.D. and Aundrayah Schermer. Dr. Ajuwon presented the training program for the Blind Specialist. During the two years that this program has been operating it has increased by a one-hundred per-cent (and more in certain areas). Opening this training program to on-line training was responsible for the significant increase in student enrollment. The majority of students are located in Missouri with students participating from three other states and two other countries. Dr. Ajuwon looks for this program to increase in the future and benefit Missouri by training the needed professionals in this field. Aundrayah Schermer presented her program which involves a multitude of school districts, professionals and parents. They received training for the provision of services to the visually impaired and blind students. At this time she covers the entire Southwest quadrant of the State of Missouri. She also provides consultation services to other distant areas.

## February Forum

The Council was complimented on re-establishing holding hearings throughout the state. Those in Springfield were particularly pleased, because there was no longer any public transportation between Springfield and Jefferson City. There was a comment from an assistant principal complimenting the Rehabilitation Services for the Blind because she was in jeopardy of losing her job until she received services from the agency. She was able to maintain employment and is currently an asset to the school. She had been informed by her doctor that she

was losing her sight, but was not referred to rehabilitation services for the blind. Fortunately a friend who is a member of the National Federation for the Blind told her about the Rehabilitation Services for the Blind.

There were two consumers that recently moved to this state. They were looking for additional training in mobility and Braille. They needed some training in Braille for themselves and their children. They had the impression that services were currently being stretched, they would like to receive these services. There was a question regarding counseling services to the family to assist them in the adjustment process where a family member is losing their vision.

There was a discussion regarding services to school children which resulted in the identification of problems related to adequate services for the low vision and blind student. The comments were; "The blind students will receive services eventually," "The low vision student may not receive services because: they are able to see," "It will cost the school district too much money to accommodate them." "They are able to read (even if it is very slowly)," "Educators do not know how to work with low vision students or what resources are available."

A vendor for teaching Braille discoursed the problem of working with the state. She stated that the state was low in paying the bills that she had submitted. They were ninety days slow in paying their bills. They also did not pay her for the travel time to and from the more distant homes that she served. Because she is required to pay her driver, in a responsible manner, this jeopardizes her income to the point of considering ceasing to provide services.

One of the clients indicated that she was currently negotiating with her counselor in order to receive adequate computer training. This comment was elicited by a direct question from a council member.

A student organization was represented by two students that identified two problems. The problem of recruiting readers was identified with particular emphasis on the fact that readers need to be paid in a timely manner because they will not wait for ninety days to receive payment. This jeopardizes the ability to maintain their studies. The other problem was that there is no uniformity in the payment for books and supplies. Some colleges bill the agency and some books and supplies are paid for directly by the student.

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